



PRESS RELEASE

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U.S. BORDER PATROL AGENT PLEADS GUILTY TO ACCEPTING BRIBES

TUCSON, ARIZONA -- The United States Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona announced that on November 25, 2003, Hector Hugo Esquinca, (D.O.B.) 05/02/1973, of Rio Rico, Arizona, pled guilty to one count of Possession with Intent to Distribute 24.05 kilograms of Cocaine, and two counts of Bribery of a Public Official, in federal district court in Tucson, Arizona.

At his change of plea hearing today before United States Magistrate Judge Bernardo P. Velasco, Mr. Esquinca signed a plea agreement admitting to the following facts:

The government can show that I participated in over 50 tape-recorded conversations with a government informant between August 9, 2000, and September 21, 2000, in which I agreed to accept bribes in exchange for assisting in the safe passage of cocaine through the United States Border Patrol checkpoint on Interstate 19, kilometer 42, near Amado, in the District of Arizona. At the time, I was employed by the United States of America as a United States Border Patrol Agent and assigned to the canine unit at the I-19 checkpoint.

(MORE)

On September 4, 2000, I communicated with the government informant through a series of pre-arranged code-words indicating that it was safe to bring the drugs through the checkpoint. I knew that the informant would either be driving or escorting a vehicle containing cocaine. A short time later I observed the informant drive through the checkpoint in the midst of several vehicles. I made no attempt to stop him or any of the vehicles around him, even though I knew that one of those vehicles contained cocaine.

In fact, one of the vehicles following the informant's was a Sonata driven by an FBI undercover agent that contained 24.05 kilograms of cocaine. I later confirmed in a telephone conversation with the informant that the Sonata contained the cocaine.

On September 6, 2000, outside my home in Rio Rico, Arizona, I accepted \$3,000 from the informant as payment for allowing a load of purported drugs to pass through the checkpoint on August 22, 2000. On September 21, 2000, inside my home in Rio Rico, Arizona, I accepted an additional \$10,000 from the informant, as payment for allowing the September 4, 2000, cocaine load to pass through the checkpoint.

I knew it was illegal to solicit and accept bribe payments in exchange for violating my official duties as a United States Border Patrol agent.

I acknowledge that the government could prove all of these facts beyond a reasonable doubt.

Bribery is a violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 201(b)(2)(C), and carries a maximum penalty of 15 years incarceration, a \$250,000 fine or both. Possession with intent to distribute cocaine is a violation of Title 21, United States Code, Section 841(a)(1), and carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment, a \$4 million fine or both.

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Sentencing is set before Judge Frank R. Zapata on Monday, February 9, 2004.

The investigation in this case was conducted by the Southern Arizona Corruption Task Force, which includes agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office of Public Responsibility (ICE/OPR), Department of Justice Office of Inspector General (DOJ/OIG), and the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division (IRS/CID). The task force also received assistance in this investigation from the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office of Investigation- Nogales (ICE-Nogales), the Santa Cruz County Metro Task Force, and the United States Border Patrol.

The prosecution is being handled by Mary Sue Feldmeier, Assistant United States Attorney, District of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona.

CASE NUMBER: CR-00-1346-TUC-FRZ
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